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ABSTRACT

Two scenarios dealing with the themes of schedule conflict and mistaken identity were performed by a class of beginning students of English as a second language at the University of Delaware. The class was divided into groups of five or six students; each group was assigned either Role A or Role B of one of the two scenarios. As in standard Strategic Interaction (SI) procedure, each group was allowed to know only the information written on its role card. The purpose of the exercise was to obtain greater insight into how SI activities contribute to the learning process. Comparison of the two performances revealed significant differences in the use of communication strategies and in control of vocabulary and the mechanisms of conversational management. Five features of the discourse were observed: use of communication strategies, consultation with supporting groups, control over target-language vocabulary, strategic interplay, and strategic conversational mechanisms. It was found that while the students abandoned communication strategies as they became more confident with the target language, they did not necessarily give up their interactive intentions. (MSE)

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Scenario Discourse: Its Contribution to L2 Acquisition*

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ABSTRACT. Two scenarios dealing with the themes of schedule conflict and mistaken identity were presented to a class of beginning ESL students at the University of Delaware. The purpose was to obtain greater insight into how interactional activities of the scenario type contribute to the learning process. The results of the study confirm the usefulness of a distinction between what learners are likely to do in order to communicate meaning in the target language and what efforts they make to achieve self-determined goals in conversation.

As a distinctive pedagogical activity, the scenario developed from the need for classroom work that would transcend concern for comprehensible exchange in learner-centered discourse in order to address the broader issues of how people negotiate and play roles in discourse (see Di Pietro 1983). As employed in Strategic Interaction (SI), groups of learners work on each role first and then elect an individual to engage the single representative of another group in conversation (see Di Pietro 1985). The point is to come to an understanding of the other person's position in the interaction and then negotiate an end that would be acceptable to the role assigned. A third phase normally follows the interaction in which the teacher acts as mediator, drawing attention to various matters that might be changed or improved in future performances.

It has already been observed (Labarca and Khanji 1986) that SI students engaging in interviews with outside evaluators rely on fewer communication strategies than students who have been instructed through another method. Since communication

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strategies are generally defined .. to be those mechanisms employed by L2 learners to make themselves understood (see Canale and Swain 1980, for example), a diminished use of them is considered to be a sign of greater conversational fluency. The question remained for us to determine how and under what circumstances learners employ communication strategies in scenarios. At the same time, we were interested in observing what happens to those interaction strategies developed by learners in the process of negotiation and role portrayal.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Two scenarios were prepared and presented to a class of first-year students enrolled in the English Language Institute of the University of Delaware. The study was conducted during the second and third week of January, 1986. The class was made up of approximately thirty-five students coming from countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America. The class was broken down into rehearsal groups of five to six students. Each group was assigned either Role A or Role B of one of the two scenarios. As in standard SI procedure, each group was not allowed to know more about the coming interaction than what was written on their role card. For example, in Scenario I ('One favor leads to another'), A does not know that B will not be able to lend his car to her after he had promised to do so because he needs it for an unexpected purpose (see Figure 1).

PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Scenario 2 ('Journey to the past') is built around an apparent case of mistaken identity. B attempts to make A agree that she is the salesperson who once sold him a defective TV set (see Figure 2).

PLACE FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The scenarios were rehearsed, performed and debriefed. As part of the rehearsal, each group was free to select the person who would represent them in the performance phase. Performances of both scenarios were video-taped. After the class ended, the author transcribed the performances, noting as closely as possible features of discourse that would be pertinent to both communicative and interactive competences as demonstrated by the performers. Appendices A and B contain the transcriptions of Scenarios 1 and 2, respectively. A key to the symbols used to transcribe the scenario performances follows in Appendix C.

The next step was to prepare edited scripts from the transcriptions (see Appendices D and E). The editing was limited to correcting grammatical errors, replacing inappropriate vocabulary where needed and smoothing out the style wherever it was overly clumsy. No changes were made in the sense or intent of what was said by the performers.

The edited scripts were shown to each role player in the original scenarios at a class meeting that took place one week after the first performances. The players were asked to look over their own lines with the purpose of noting how their first performances might be executed in a more fluent and accurate way. They were told that a verbatim repeat performance was neither required nor expected of them. The edited scripts were taken away from them after approximately ten minutes. A second performance then took place with the same students and was video-taped. The discourse resulting from each scenario was subsequently transcribed (see Appendices F and G).

FINDINGS

A comparison of the two performances of the scenarios reveals significant differences not only in the employment of communication strategies but also in the control of vocabulary and the mechanics of conversational management. Five features of the discourse were observed as follows:

(1) Use of communication strategies. While all four role-players abandoned the use of communication strategies in the second performances of their scenarios, their first performances showed evidence of several. From Scenario 1: Echoing by A ('I must go to Wilmington ... because I must; maybe you can give me a ride, a ride; maybe you can take time you can take me') in which an important portion of an utterance is repeated to assure that it was understood; A also engaged in a paraphrase for the same purpose ('maybe your friend have a big car car size big'). At one point, B found himself rephrasing a sentence ('You can wait for . . maybe I can give you or can stay about half an hour'). B also makes a direct request for definition when he asks, 'What's a ride?' There are two clear examples of communication strategies in Scenario 2: overslow delivery by B ('in a . . once . . time) and repetition by A ('I am I am different').

(2) Consultations with supporting groups. A returned to her group for consultation four times in the first performance of Scenario 1. B, in Scenario 1, exercised his right to consultation with his group only once but with important results for the ensuing discourse. It is after B's consultation that he decides to cooperate with A in finding a solution to the dilemma about his availability to help A pick up her desk. A's many consultations with her group reflect her need to test out various strategies in her efforts to gain B's services as a chauffeur. In

the Scenario 2, only role-player A interrupted the performance in order to consult with her group. The interruption comes early in the performance, at the point where A realizes that B has taken her for someone else. When A returns to the interaction with B, she has apparently decided to disagree with B and insist that she was not formally a TV salesperson. The game plans invoked by A and B remain unchanged throughout their interaction and each role-player feels sufficiently fluent not to require intermittent consultations. It is also significant that no consultations were held during the second performances of either scenario. All four role-players felt that they had gained enough control over vocabulary, structure, conversational protocols and interactive strategies not to interrupt the flow of their discourse.

(3) Control over target-language vocabulary. The two-part verb pick up was almost certainly a new lexical item for the role-players of Scenario 1. Both A and B use it (A to refer to picking up her desk and B, to meeting his cousin at the airport). However, neither chose the option of detaching the particle, e.g., 'pick my desk up' instead of 'pick up my desk.' In some cases, they omit the verb entirely (e.g., A: 'In that way you can bring me to the other desk...'). In Scenario 2, B has difficulty referring to his supposedly defective TV set. He attempts to use the word 'apparatus', without success. Even though the author of this paper replaced that word with the lexeme 'TV set' in the edited script, B attempted again, in the second performance of Scenario 2, to use the term 'apparatus.' On the other hand, the replacement of 'pretty' with 'handsome' in the edited script of Scenario 2 was effective. A plausible explanation might be found in the fact that the author debriefed A about the customary use of 'handsome' in English when he handed her the edited script. As part of the general debriefing after the first performances of the scenarios,

the author asked the class to select the 'most important vocabulary' from what was said by the role-players. Among the words called out were 'pick up', 'afterwards' and 'ride' from Scenario 1 and 'sales', 'TV' and 'clothing' from Scenario 2. In the author's opinion, these lexical items were considered important not for their semantic content but for their strategic value in the discourse.

(4) Strategic interplay. In comparing the first and second performances of both scenarios, it becomes clear that the role-players have kept in mind the general flow of strategies and the general direction in which the discourse flows. The second performances of both scenarios are shorter than the first performances, due largely to the lack of any need to use communication strategies and to map out each strategy and counter-strategy along the way. For example, A in Scenario 1 moves directly to the suggestion that she could accompany B to the airport after he informs her of his obligation to pick up his cousin there. B in Scenario 2 does not bother to imply that A might have a twin sister who sold him the defective TV set since that particular line of development was unproductive. The behavior of all role-players supports the observation of Hynds (1985) that humans are not inert organisms subject to the push and pull of motives but are rather 'naive empiricists' attempting to predict and control their environments by anticipating events in interaction with others.

(5) Strategic conversational mechanisms. We observed that eye-contact and hand gestures of the role-players were conditioned by their home cultures but were, nevertheless, indicative of the basic effort to gain their personal ends as dictated by their roles. More significant was how the role-players used various mechanisms of conversation to make their point. For example, conversational overlap was in evidence several times:

when B in the first performance of Scenario 1 overlaps with A in order to insist that his car is not large enought to accommodate both her and his cousin and in Scenario 2, when A forcefully contradicts B's opinion that she was the person who sold him the defective TV set. B in Scenario 2 also engages in a number of prosodic effects to make her sales pitch. For example, she uses high pitch and overloud stress on the words 'pretty' (first performance) and 'handsome' (second performance) and she lengthens the stressed syllables of 'wonderful' ('wonnnnnnderful') and 'today' ('todayyyyy').

CONCLUSIONS

To understand what has been acquired or even overtly learned by L2 students is not easy. How has our scenario activity promoted the learning and/or acquisition of English in the classroom? We can observe, with no difficulty, that our students abandon communication strategies as they become more confident with the target language but do not necessarily give up their interactive intentions over time. But how will this experience affect their future use of English? What, precisely, have they acquired? Acquisition implies finality; once something is acquired in language, it is presumably immune to being lost. Learned skills, on the other hand, may disappear. But how do we measure what is gained and how do we assess its durability?

Perhaps it is advisable to set aside the acquisition/learning dichotomy and approach the question of advancing competence in English in terms of development. Becoming competent in any new language involves far more than morpheme acquisition or even vocabulary expansion. It involves no less than the entire person in presentation of self and negotiation with other persons in a wide range of human activities. Development in a new language cannot be reduced to the single dimension of form and artifact to which acquisition and learning have been limited. If language is essentially

a social phenomenon, assessing learner competences must be through classroom performances that take this social fact as their starting point. Reduced reliance on communication strategies coupled with improvements over time in the management of conversational mechanisms, the utilization of interactive strategies and the portrayal of scenario roles should be taken as signs of increasing levels of development among learners.

Appendix A.

Scenario 1: One favor leads to another. First performance.

A: Mr. Jim . . could you lend your cars to me . . uh because I must go to Wilmington to pick up a desk? (be)cause I must.

B: I am sorry.

A: Very sorry? Why?

B: (I'm sorry be)cause I must uhh pick up my cousin from the [airport.

A: [ohhh] I'm sorry too.

T: Well?

teacher turns to group A

T: (are you going to) help? help her? It's all over? No more no more desk?

A returns from her group

A: Could you introduce your friend? he has a or (maybe) he has a car the other car to lend me?

B: I don't know any friends here. (I am new) here in this country. You can wait for . . maybe I can give you or can stay about half an hour.

A: OK. Just a minute.

A goes to her group for another consultation and then returns to face B

A: When you pick up your cousin too, maybe you can give me a ride, a ride.

Teacher looks at B's group

T: OK, help him.

B: What's a ride?

T: Can you help him? What's a ride?

Another student mumbles something to B

B: I ask you to to . . you can make it that yourself.

A: My meaning is . . . if you go to (pick up) your cousin. . it is the latest thing. . maybe you can take time you can take me.

B: No, that's very difficult because he has many baggage.

B looks at class and smiles while A goes to her group for another consultation.

B: I'll stay here.

A returns to face B

A: Is your car size

general laughter

A goes back to her group

A: Maybe your friend have a big car car size big

B: My friend's? I tell you (before) I have no friends here.

B carries on some comments with others in class then he goes to his group

A: When are you going to the airport with your cousin.

B: I go about 2 o'clock.

A: Two o'clock. OK. I go with you to airport. In that way you can bring me to the other desk . . . with me?

B: You go me to the airport?

A: First and [then

B: [but I tell you . .] it's not like a car. It's just a bicycle.

A: OK. You can bring . . . the first time, you (can) go to the airport and to pick . . . is there some informations . . . in the airport?

B: What?

A: Is informations . . .

B: Is there informations . . . no, I know where is my cousin came. He came to to he waits . .

A: You can pick [your cousins] to your house

B: [he is here]

A: and then could you give me together to pick my desk?

T: [Afterwards]

B: [Yes]

A: Afterwards?

B: After, after I go bring my . . . cou . . pick up my cousin I will came back to you.

T: OK!

Appendix B.

Scenario 2: Journey to the past. First performance.

A: ↑Where're you going?

B: Oh, I going to New York City. (How about you?)

A: First, good, I have to pass in . in the New New York because I . I just returned to the country. You're ↑pretty today! Where you buy your clothes?

B: Let me, let me oh! . I remember that uhhh we meet . . in another time.

A: Oh, I don't think

B: Oh yes! You sold me a (TV) a television set in a . . once . . time.

A: No . . . I don't [think so
B: [(You) you remember in the last year . . . more or less in July . . . I went to the . . uhh . . Radio Shack store . . . you worked there?

A: Minute, please, just a minute.

A goes to her group to consult.

A: Sir, I think you're wrong because I . I . my job is [I am sure
B: [I am sure
A: No, no
B: [because
A: [You you make a mistake you make a mistake because I, I'm traveling sales . sales . [only sport
Teacher: [clothing
A: huh?
Teacher: clothing.
A: only sales clothing . . OK? I I think you're you're . .y you're you're you're [I am sure
B: [I am sure because uh . uh . for your bad sold . I lost . so much . . money.

A: No, no . . You're crazy . you are crazy . . you are very crazy.

B: Tell me . I . I tell about . . . I I told you about . my uh problem. When I bought the TV . . uh . . I lost . so much money because . the uh apparate . . . apparatus . . uh uh

B: was very, [very] . . uh . . bad.
A: [ohh] It's terrible.
But I I sell only clothes. [I don't understand
B: When I I send you . .]
A: ↑anything on TV, radios, I don't understand anything.]
B: [I I . . .
A: I sell↑ only beautiful clothes. OK?
B: I am sure . . youuuu . .]
A: [No.
B: You send . . uh uh . . you sold me this apparatus.
A: No, no. I I don't sell . . . I ↑never sold (any) TVs and radios. I don't understand ↑anything about . . .]
B: [Really?
A: Really. I am special. I understand only the special . . . OK? I know, I know what's what's the man dress now, OK? What the women uh can dress [now] but TV, radio, I don't know . . .
B: [ohh]
B: Maybe you are a twins?
(laughter)
You have a sis(ter) . . .
Teacher: You have a sister? You have a sister? What do you say to him. Tell him tell him.]
A: [Ok Ok! uhhhhh I I my, my my I have a store, a big store, and mmm uhhh I (sell) only beautiful clothes for men. . . you understand?
B: But uh but my question for you . . . (there) is a sister, someone similar to you?
A: I don't think so . . . I am I am different for the other parents. I am Brazilian.
B: Are you sure?
A: Yeah. . .

Appendix C.

Key to symbols in transcription of discourse

<u>===</u> overloud speech

~~~ oversoft speech

. . . silent hesitation; each dot represents about .5 seconds of time

<u>uh</u> hesitation filler delivered with mid central vowel

<u>uhhh</u> lengthened vowel of hesitation filler

<u>hmmm</u> bilabial nasal hesitation filler

↑ syllable following symbol is delivered on overhigh pitch

( ) compressed speech, with overfast delivery

[ ] segments of speech delivered simultaneously by two or more individuals

] rapid onset of speech by second party, without normal interval of silence in turn taking
~~~

Appendix D.

Edited script from scenario 1.

A: Could you lend me your car? I must go to Wilmington to pick up a desk.

B: I'm sorry but I can't.

A: Why not?

B: I must pick up my cousin at the airport.

A: That's too bad. Could you introduce me to a friend who has a car to lend me?

B: I don't have any friends here. I am new in this country. Can you wait until tomorrow or wait here for about half an hour?

A: Maybe you can give me a ride when you go to pick up your cousin.

B: You can go by yourself.

A: I mean that you can take me along when you go to pick up your cousin.

B: I can't because he has a lot of baggage.

A: Maybe your friend has a big car.

B: But I told you that I have no friends here.

A: When are you going to the airport to get your cousin?

B: I'm going about 2 o'clock.

A: OK. Two o'clock. I'll go with you to the airport so that you can take me to get the desk afterwards.

B: You want to go with me to the airport?

A: You can pick up your cousin, take him to your house and then take me to pick up my desk.

B: I'll come back for you after I pick up my cousin.

Appendix E.

Edited script from scenario 2.

A: Where are you going?
B: To New York City. How about you?

A: I'm going to New York first. I need to stop off there because I've just returned to this country.
You look handsome today! Where do you buy your clothes?

B: I seem to remember that we've met before.

A: I don't think so.

B: Oh, yes. You sold me a television set once.

A: No, I don't think so.

B: Do you remember last year, around July, I came to the Radio Shack store where you worked?

A: I think you're wrong because my job is selling clothes.

B: I am sure.

A: No, no. You're making a mistake because I'm a traveling salesperson. I only sell sport clothing.

B: I am sure becuase I lost a lot of money on account of you.

A: No, no. You're very mistaken.

B: Let me tell you about my problem.. I lost a lot of money when I bought the TV because it was very defective.

A: Oh, that's terrible, but I sell only clothes. I don't know anything about TVs or radios.

B: But you sold me the TV.

A: I sell only beautiful clothes. I know what men are wearing now. I know what women are wearing. But I don't know anything about TVs and radios.

B: Maybe you are a twin? Do you have a sister somewhere who looks just like you?

A: No, I look quite different from my relatives. I'm from Brazil.

B: Are you certain?

A: Yes. There is no one like me in New York or anywhere else. Only in Brazil.

Appendix F.

Scenario 1. Second Performance.

A: (Could you) bring me . . lend me . . . your car . . uhhh so, I must go tc Wilmington . . to pick up (a) desk.
B: I sorry . . I . . I can't.
A: Why not?
B: Because I must go pick up my cousin from the airport.
A: Maybe you can (in)troduce your friends to me uhhh she he can . lend . . me his car.
B: Say again . but I am new in this country. I have no friends here.
A: hmmmm Maybe I go with you . . uh . to the airport and then . . you . . can . . . bring . . me .. to take . my . desk.
B: You can go by yourself.
A: hmmmm No I mean that . . you go to the airport first and then . . take me to my . . to take my desk
B: You lost so much time
A: uhhh yeah. When when will you go to the airport?
B: [After two o'clock
A: [uh ahhh
B: [I mean . . two o'clock
A: [two o'clock.
A: hmmmm OK. I will go with you to the airport. After . . No! . . you can take me to the . . to pick my desk afterwards.
B: You wanna go with me to the ↑airport?
A: Yes . . when you come back here?
B: No (I) I will came back . I want I want to pick you up to Wilmington to take your desk.
A: OK I will be back here from . . after one o'clock.

Appendix G.

Scenario 2. Second performance.

A: Good morning. How are you?
B: Fine, fine.
A: I'm fine! Where're you going?
B: To New York City, uhh hmmm how about you?
A: Ohhh at first I'm going to New York because I . . just . . I've just uhh (re)turned to this country uhhh but you're very handsome todayyyy. . where're you buying your clothes?
B: Ohhh let me . . hmmm I seemed to remember uhhh we've meet before.
A: Nooo I don't think so.
B: I am sure.
A: No, I don't think so.
B: Do you remember . . last year 1 around July . I . came to (the) Radio Shack where you work-ed?
A: I think you making . made a mistake because I ooonl . . I sell only clothes. I am a traveling uhhh traveling person woman.
B: I am sure because I . . lost a lot of money account of you.
A: No, I don't accept anything about TVs or radios I am only a sale . . some clothes . sport clothes.
B: Let me tell you uhh when I uh bought the (TV) I losss uhhh lot of money because the TV was uhhh defective.
A: It terrible I know but . I'm never sell . . TVs or radios. I only sells clothes. Look at (your) shoes . I think you need to change your shoes.
These [shoes are] the last year's styles,
B: [These are nice shoes]
A: the winter style.
B: uh but uh right now, I (don't need) any . . clothes.
A: ahhh but if . you . see . my . clothes . . it's wonnnnderful. I think you're . you need . to buy some thing.

B: But I suppose uhhh your . . . store is (very ex)pense.

A: No, don't worry about the price. Its very very cheap. It [have a lot] of kind of fashions.

B: [uhhh] That's too bad because . . right now I only need a . a . recuper recup (my) money.

Role A: You must go to Wilmington today to pick up a desk for your room. Your friend has lent you his car for this purpose. You know how to drive a car but you are not familiar with traffic laws in the United States. Ask your friend if he would come with you and drive the car for you this afternoon.

Role B: You promised to lend your car to your friend so that she can pick up a desk. However, a close relative called you just now to tell you that he is at the airport and needs a ride to town and would like to see you. Try to make another arrangement with your friend about using the car this afternoon.

Figure 1. Senario entitled 'One favor leads to another.'

Role A: You are traveling on a train and are sitting next to someone who looks familiar to you. You realize that this person is the one who once sold you an expensive TV set that stopped working after one week. It cost you much money to have it fixed and you did not have the chance to tell this person about your problem because she was no longer at the store when you returned there. What will you say now?

Role B: You work as a traveling salesperson and you are riding on a train. The person sitting next to you is very well-dressed. Since you sell clothing, this person may be interested in buying something from you. What will you say to him?

Figure 2. Senario entitled: 'Journey to the past.'

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